DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 441 CS 503 622

AUTHOR Cox, J. Robert
TITLE Argument and Human Decision-Making: Teaching the Upper-Level Course.
INSTITUTION Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha., Lawrence, Kans.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 13p.
AVAILABLE FROM Allen Press, Inc., P.O. Box 368, Lawrence, KS 66044 ($1.50 single copy, prepaid).
JOURNAL CIT Speaker and Gavel; v18 n1 Fall 1980

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Course Content; Course Descriptions; *Debate; *Decision Making; Higher Education; *Persuasive Discourse; Problem Solving; Speech Communication; *Speech Curriculum; *Speech Instruction

ABSTRACT

The place of argumentation within the speech communication curriculum is the focus of this article. The article provides a rationale for an upper-level college course in the deliberation and decision making process currently taught at the University of North Carolina, and relates that rationale to broader concerns of argumentation theory. Various topics discussed in the article include (1) argument and problematic choice, (2) the nature of problematic choice, and (3) argument and explanation. (RL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

speaker and gavel

ED208441

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Argument and Human Decision-Making: Teaching the Upper-Level Course—J. Robert Cox 1

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Bill Balthrop

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

volume 18, number 1 fall, 1980

CS 503 622

speaker and gavel

Official publication of Delta Sigma Rho—Tau Kappa Alpha
National Honorary Forensic Society

PUBLISHED AT LAWRENCE, KANSAS
By ALLEN PRESS, INC.

Second-class postage paid at Lawrence, Kansas, U.S.A. 66044

Issued quarterly in Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer. The Journal carries no paid advertising.

NATIONAL OFFICERS OF DSR-TKA

President: JACK HOWE, California State University, Long Beach
Vice President: DAVID A. THOMAS, Auburn University
Secretary: BERTRAM W. GROSS, Marshall University
Treasurer: ELAINE BRUGGEMEIER, Loyola University
Trustee: WAYNE C. EUBANK, University of New Mexico
Historian: JOHN A. LYNCH, St. Anselm's College

REGIONAL GOVERNORS, MEMBERS AT LARGE, AND REPRESENTATIVES

Regional Governors: JOHN A. LYNCH, St. Anselm's College; JAMES J. HALL, St. John's University; HALFORD RYAN, Washington and Lee College; KASSIAN KOVALCHEK, Vanderbilt University; ROBERT O. WEISS, DePauw University; VERNON R. McGUIRE, Texas Tech University; DONN W. PARSON, University of Kansas; LARRY SCHNOOR, Mankato State University; WAYNE CALLAWAY, University of Wyoming; JOHN DeBROSS, University of Southern California

Members at Large: TOM KANE (Past President), University of Pittsburgh; JAMES A. JOHNSON, The Colorado College; MICHAEL M. OVERKING, Fairmont State College

ACHS Representative: JAMES H. McBATH, University of Southern California

Representative on SCA Committee on Intercollegiate Debate and Discussion: JOHN GREG, St. John's University

EDITORIAL BOARD

ROBERT J. BRANHAM, Bates College; SKIP COULTER, Samford University; JOAN DONOVAN, St. Lawrence University; G. THOMAS GOODNIGHT, Northwestern University; SIDNEY R. HILL, JR., Mississippi State University; THOMAS J. HYNES, University of Louisville; ANITA JAMES, Ohio University; JAMES A. JOHNSON, The Colorado College; CHARLES KAUFFMAN, University of Virginia; LUCY KEELE, California State University, Fullerton; JAMES KLUMPP, University of Nebraska; JOHN T. MORELLO, James Madison University; LARRY SCHNOOR, Mankato State University; JOHN SCHUNK, Wichita State University; BARBARA WARNICK, Tulane University; ROBERT O. WEISS, DePauw University; MARILYN YOUNG, Florida State University

EDITOR

BILL BALTHROP, 115 Bingham Hall, 007A, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514

speaker and gavel

Volume 18 Fall 1980 Number 1

ARGUMENT AND HUMAN DECISION-MAKING: Teaching the Upper-Level Course

J. Robert Cox

One gains a striking perspective on the status of argumentation studies in recent years by reviewing Gronbeck's 1972 survey of departments of Speech Communication:

> Scanning graduate catalogues from universities across the nation soon makes one painfully aware how little actually is being done with argument and argumentation in our graduate programs.[1]

Gronbeck observed that, "Argument as a discrete subject matter receives generally bare attention."[2]

The scholarship, conferences, and curricula development in argumentation studies since Gronbeck's survey, by contrast, mark this as an enormously fertile area within our discipline. Key essays by Brockriede,[3] Willard,[4] O'Keefe,[5] and McKerrow,[6] among others, urged reconceptualization of "argument" and "arguing" and closely scrutinized procedures that had been used previously to analyze arguers' claims. Participants at the July 1974 Task Force Assembly of the National Developmental Conference on Forensics in Sedalia, Colorado, adopted an "argumentative perspective" in viewing forensics.[7] The American Forensic Association, in its 1978 meeting in Minneapolis, committed itself to "the publication of a collection of essays in argumentation theory that will be reflective of the highest scholarly standards of the Association."[8] One year later, the AFA and the Speech Communciation Association sponsored jointly a Conference on

---

J. Robert Cox is Associate Professor of Speech Communication and former Director of Debate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[1] Bruce E. Gronbeck, "Four Approaches to Studying Argument in Graduate Programs," *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 9 (1972), 350.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Wayne Brockriede, "Where Is Argument?" *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 11 (1975), 179–82.

[4] Charles Arthur Willard, "On the Utility of Descriptive Diagrams for the Analysis and Criticism of Arguments," *Communication Monographs*, 43 (1976), 308–19; and "A Reformulation of the Concept of Argument: The Constructivist/Interactionist Foundations of a Sociology of Argument," *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 14 (1978), 121–40.

[5] Daniel J. O'Keefe, "Two Concepts of Argument," *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 13 (1977), 121–28.

[6] Ray E. McKerrow, "Rhetorical Validity: An Analysis of Three Perspectives on the Justification of Rhetorical Argument," *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 13 (1977), 133–41.

[7] Cf. *Forensics as Communication: The Argumentative Perspective*, James H. McBath, ed. (Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1975).

[8] Report of the Publications Committee of the American Forensics Association, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 1978; cf. J. Robert Cox and Charles A. Willard, *Advances in Argumentation Theory and Research* (in press).

[9] *Proceedings of the Summer Conference on Argumentation*, Jack Rhodes and Sara Newell, eds. (Salt Lake City: AFA and SCA, 1980).

Argumentation in Salt Lake City, Utah,[9] and plans were made for a second conference in August 1981. And the sixty-sixth annual meeting of the SCA felt the need to offer a "short course" in "Recent Developments in Argument Theory" for debate coaches and instructors of courses in argumentation.[10]

The critical writings and pedagogy of this period are marked by a movement away from formalist views and toward a processual understanding of human argumentation. In introducing a special issue of the *Journal of the American Forensic Association* devoted to argumentation theory in 1977, I noted, "Greater concern has been displayed in viewing argumentation as a distinct form of human communication—as a set of interrelationships among audiences, social values and the giving of reasons for claims."[11] By the beginning of this decade, the study and teaching of "argument" had come into its own.

It would seem appropriate, then, to update Gronbeck's 1972 assessment of what is being done with argument and argumentation in our upper-division courses.[12] The present essay offers some (anecdotal) evidence toward this end. My purpose is to describe the rationale for an upper-level course, "Deliberation and the Decision-Making Process," which I teach at UNC, and to relate this rationale to broader concerns of argumentation theory.

Argument and "Problematic" Choice

"Deliberation and the Decision-Making Process" is a seminar for seniors and M.A. students in the criticism of arguments used in controversial public policy decisions in late twentieth-century America. The syllabus notes that the course places emphasis upon "the role of human symbolization and interaction in actors' construction of 'justification' for particular choices." Understanding of the nature and uses of argument are drawn from discussion of cases in Federal regulatory rule-making, land-use decisions by local governmental units, and such "classic" decisions as the U.S. decision to drop the A-bomb on Japan in 1945 and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

In the process of discussing these and other cases, several questions of theoretical interest are raised:

> What does it mean to label a choice as "rational"? How are the components of a decision problem identified and conveyed in ordinary language? Can decision-makers ever "prove" statements about preferences and values? What is the "logic" of prediction? And what does it mean to say that a decision-maker has "justified" a particular course of action?

Underlying such questions is a view of "argument" as *reason-giving behavior, the purpose of which is the "justification" of belief, judgment, or action.*

Although the seminar focuses upon public policy cases, the rationale for the study of argument is drawn from a more fundamental concern with the "problematic" nature of human choice. The concept of choice or judg-

---

[10] Speech Communication Association, Sixty-Sixth Annual Meeting, New York, November 13, 1980.

[11] J. Robert Cox, Editorial Note," *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 13 (1977), p. 117.

[12] The phrase "upper-division" or "upper-level" is meant to refer to courses available both to seniors and graduate students.

ment—*krisis* in Aristotle's *ars rhetorica*[13]—has occupied a central position in rhetorical theory at least since the classical Greek period. Aristotle observed that the questions which humans dispute, and upon which judgments must be pronounced, are dependent in part on factors that cannot be known for certain, where "merely usual [probable] and contingent conclusions must be drawn from premises of the same sort . . . ."[14] What is needed in such cases, then, is a method (*techne*) of practical judgment, i.e., the art of rhetoric. Students gain an understanding of *argument-as-method*, then, through an understanding of the *problems* we face in making personal and public choices.

At a second level, the process of "reason-giving" also becomes a critical methodology students learn to employ when studying the arguments of other actors. (I will discuss this in more detail in the last section of the essay.) The seminar thus incorporates a dual rationale: "Argument" is a method (*techne*) by which naive social actors resolve conflicts and make choices and, also, a *mode of explanation* used by observers/critics of decision-making behavior.

The Nature of "Problematic" Choice

Argument, Brockriede suggests, is *"a process whereby people reason their way from one set of problematic ideas to the choice of another."* [15] A description of the issues that render a choice "problematic" for social actors thus provides one basis for instructional units in the upper-level course in argumentation.

The "Deliberation and the Decision-Making Process" (DDMP) seminar describes a choice as arising from an actor's perception of a "situation." Situations are comprised of participant-defined objects, events, and value hierarchies. Actors speak of "the situation at the office," referring to their interaction with particular persons, events, and relationships which characterize the component elements of the referent "the office." Similarly, one may refer to "the energy situation," "the China situation," or, more elliptically, "the Cold War," "a crisis of the spirit," or "public apathy."

A situation becomes "unsatisfactory" when actors perceive what Bitzer terms an *exigence*: "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be."[16] Such definition of situation invites reflection on the ways and means for acting in regard to the situation in an effort to modify its exigence.

Though the occasion for choice arises out of an "unsatisfactory" situation, not every choice is thereby a problematic one. While driving from home to the office, a person notices a utility line blocking the intersection

---

[13] "But since the object of Rhetoric is judgment—for judgments are pronounced in deliberative rhetoric and judicial proceedings are a judgment . . . ." Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, tr. John Henry Freese (London and New York, 1926), 1377b, pp. 21–22. For a discussion of Aristotle's use of *krisis*, see Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), ch. 4.

[14] Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, tr. Lane Cooper (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932; paperback ed.), p. 12.

[15] Brockriede, p. 180.

[16] Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1 (Winter 1968), 6.

ahead and decides (in a moment's reflection) to take Franklin instead of South Columbia Street. And on innumerable occasions, actors monitor their actions, movements, communication, and encounters by making similar non-problematic choices that regulate, adjust, or alter these situations in a positive way.

The DDMP seminar suggests that choice becomes problematic only when actors attribute certain qualities to a situation and to their relationship to it. In his discussion of *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Jean Paul Sartre relates an interesting illustration of this kind of situation.[17] Though cited as an example of Sartre's concept of "forlornness," the incident also reveals the preconditions and essential characteristics of problematic choice.

The incident involved a male student in Paris who came to see Sartre during the Nazi occupation of France in World War II. The young man's father was on bad terms with the mother and inclined toward collaboration with the Germans; his older brother had been killed in the German offensive of 1940, and the boy, "with somewhat immature, but generous feelings, wanted to avenge him."[18] The boy lived alone with his mother who—very much upset over the Vichi leanings of her husband and death of her older son—looked on the boy as her only consolation.

Sartre describes the situation confronting his student in the following way:

> The boy was faced with the choice of leaving for England and joining the Free French Forces—that is, leaving his mother behind—or remaining with his mother and helping her to carry on. He was fully aware that the woman lived only for him and that his going-off—and perhaps his death—would plunge her into despair. He was also aware that every act that he did for his mother's sake was a sure thing, in the sense that it was helping her to carry on, whereas every effort he made toward going off and fighting was an uncertain move which might run aground and prove completely useless; for example, on his way to England he might, while passing through Spain, be detained indefinitely in a Spanish camp; he might reach England or Algiers and be stuck at a desk job.[19]

As a result of his understanding of the situation, Sartre notes, the boy faced two very different kinds of action: "one, concrete, immediate but concerning only one individual; the other concerned an incomparably vaster group, a national collectivity, but for that very reason was dubious, and might be interrupted en route."[20]

At the same time, Sarte explains, the boy's action rested upon his choice between two kinds of ethics or bases for his decision. On the one hand was an "ethics of sympathy, of personal devotion;" and in choosing that ethical perspective, he would be choosing to remain with his mother in Paris. And, on the other, was "a broader ethics, but one whose efficacy was more dubious."[21]

Who could help the boy choose? No *a priori* source or decision rule is available to the young man which assures him of the correctness of his choice. Neither Christian doctrine, utilitarian nor Kantian

---

[17] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957).
[18] Ibid., p. 24.
[19] Ibid., pp. 24–25.
[20] Ibid., p. 25.
[21] Ibid.

ethics can specify the rightness of particular action in such circumstances, Sartre argues: "Which does the greater good, the vague act of fighting in a group, or the concrete one of helping a particular human being to go on living?"[22]

The painful dilemma faced by Sartre's young student reveals two *preconditions* for the occurrence of problematic choice. The DDMP seminar outlines these as:

(i) *A choice is potentially problematic when an actor perceives there may be alternate ways or means for redressing an exigence;* and
(ii) *A choice is potentially problematic when an actor acknowledges his or her own self as the source of behavior in such situations.*

(i) *A choice is potentially problematic when an actor perceives there may be alternate ways or means for redressing an exigence.*

In an important sense the DDMP seminar stresses the possibility of alternate modes of acting is not "given" in a choice situation. That is to say simply that an actor's recognition/perception of an exigence does not, by this fact, reveal an *a priori* set of "available" acts *vis-a-vis* this situation. A situation that is perceived to be "unsatisfactory"—the death of the young student's brother at the hands of the Germans in 1940—presents only "possibility" for actors' construction of alternate "ways" of believing, judging, or acting. Such "ways" are indeterminate. They arise from the imagination ("with somewhat immature, but generous feelings, wanted to avenge him"), experience, or symbolic interaction among actors/participants rather than the "situation." Taken by itself, the construction of alternate ways or means for acting is insufficient to render a choice problematic, though it is the essential precondition for "choice" of any kind.

(ii) *A choice is potentially problematic when an actor acknowledges his or her own self as the source of behavior in such situations.*

A choice becomes potentially problematic for the participants when they cannot, or choose not to, separate choice of belief, judgment, or action from *self-as-agent*. Mere recognition *that* alternatives are "available" does not entail acceptance of the actor's self as the *source* of action. Authorization for action, for instance, could be invested in a transcendent source ("not my will, but thine"), doctrine, ethical system, or other actors. An actor may seek to escape personal responsibility of self-as-agent by attributing causality to environmental "forces," "conditions," or other external stimuli ("it couldn't be helped").

Acceptance of responsibility, self-as-agent, for acting is to acknowledge *intentionality* in believing, judging, or acting. The "problem" of choice for the young student in Vichi-controlled Paris emerged from this recognition: the possibility of consolation or anguish for his mother, of aid to the Free French Forces, began in his acceptance of himself as the agent of his acts. The boy was responsible not only for his acts but for choosing the basis on which his ultimate decision rested.

The beginning of problematic choice, thus, lies in Sartre's advice to his young student: "[I]n coming to see me he knew the answer I was going to give him, and I had only one answer to give: 'You're free, choose, that is, invent.'"[23]

---

[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., p. 28.

An actor's perception/construction of alternate "available" ways or means for acting and acknowledgment of self-as-agent (intentionality) are the essential *preconditions* of problematic choice. Action that is taken to modify an exigence becomes truly problematic when, in addition to these, one of the following conditions is present:

(iii) intra- or interpersonal conflict among preferred ends of acting;
(iv) inadequate knowledge regarding the consequences of acting;
(v) absence of a priori *means for assessing the correctness of acting in a particular situation.*

Each of these attributes of a choice "situation" serves as the basis for a unit of study in the DDMP seminar: (iii) *argumentation regarding actors' preferences and/or values,* (iv) *the "logic" of prediction in situations involving risk or uncertainty*; and (v) *the nature of "decision rules."*

(iii) *The possibility for acting becomes problematic when the ends (outcomes/consequences) desired by an actor or actors are perceived to be mutually unattainable.*

The occurrence either of intra- or inter-personal conflict among preferred ends forestalls habituated responses to an unsatisfactory situation. Such conflict may involve the pursuit of two or more outcomes, both or all of which are desired but which require mutually exclusive acts. Desire for revenge of his older brother could be pursued by Sartre's student only at the expense of leaving his mother behind. Conflict arises from his full awareness that the woman "lived only for him and that his going-off—and perhaps his death—would plunge her into despair."[24]

Interpersonally, conflict also may exist among actors' assessment of the same ends (consequences) or in the hierarchical ordering of these ends. Which is the more important? Honor/revenge or personal devotion/obligation?

Choice becomes problematic, then, in that it is value-laden. Actors, in acknowledging themselves as agents, confront multiple and often conflicting preferences that are associated with the possibilities of acting. In a similar sense, they face alternate bases for the justification of concrete preferences. The student in Sartre's narration was "wavering between two kinds of ethics": one of personal devotion, and the other of collective obligation (patriotism, honor, duty to country). Though he was "free," Sartre advised, he was responsible for the construction (invention) of *reasons* for his choice of ethical grounding. In general, the DDMP seminar stresses argument's *function* to be (a) this "situated" assessment of ends (consequences) of alternative courses and (b) the reconciliation of plural and, often, conflicting evaluations or ethical bases of choice.

(iv) *Choice becomes problematic when an actor or actors have inadequate knowledge regarding the consequences of the possible ways and means of acting in a situation.*

A "problem" of decision-making arises when individual actors do not know which of several outcomes of an action will eventually prevail. Even where actors agree upon the end to be sought, it is often not clear which of the several available acts will most likely secure it. The young student's desire to join the Free French Forces was "dubious," in Sartre's words, precisely because its possibility depended upon contingent acts of agents over whom the boy had little control: "for example, on his way to England

[24] Ibid., p. 24.

he might, while passing through Spain, be detained indefinitely in a Spanish camp; he might reach England or Algiers and be stuck in an office at a desk job."[25]

The relation between actors' knowledge of contingent events and action is such that judgment must be based upon non-compelling reasons. Often choice of practical belief or action must be taken on the basis of:

> incomplete, conflicting, or less than totally veracious sources of information; and
>
> rival hypotheses or explanations of the relevant causal features of a situation, system, or state of affairs.

The DDMP seminar encourages students to explore those bases upon which actors make judgments regarding the completeness, veracity, or accuracy of reports, and of the plausibility of explanations about contingent states. Such investigation also includes the study of actors' definitions of "sufficient grounds" for belief or "good reasons" for their prediction of the consequences (ends) of action. Argument which addresses such problematic judgments, students learn, is marked by *uncertainty*, i.e., actors may lack either knowledge of or control over those events which render their conclusions "merely usual [probable] and contingent."[26]

(v) *Choice becomes problematic in the absence of agreed upon means for determining the "correctness" of belief or action in a particular situation.*

The DDMP seminar observes that, to the extent actors' choices are *intentional* and procede from *alternative* ways or means for redressing an exigence, decision-makers (or their constituents) insist that some basis exist for important choices. One believes or does x and not y or z because there exist "good" or "sufficient" reasons for x. Intentional choice, then, because it is not determined by causes, forces, or stimuli in the usual sense of these terms, is ordinarily expected to be *justified*.

One of the major instructional units in the DDMP seminar thus is the study of "decision rules" or *grounds of actors' integration of the various elements of choice and the justification of particular acts*. For ordinary, repetitive, or non-problematical decisions—as eating, dressing, movement, or much of our social communication, for example—actors evolve habits, customs, rules, or other informal guides. Such *habituated* decision guides permit easy, fairly rapid, and satisfactory "solutions" to ways of behaving in predictable situations. Because they ordinarily and regularly address the exigence of a situation in satisfactory ways, they provide "sufficient" grounds for one's actions.

The DDMP seminar suggests that, in a similar manner, actors—individually and as members of larger collectivities—evolve rules, principles, models, and maxims of "correct" judgment and behavior. We invoke principles of Christian doctrine ("love thy neighbor as thyself"), Kantian or utilitarian ethics ("never treat any person as a means, but as an end"; "the greatest good for the greatest number"), or social proverbs and maxims ("better safe than sorry"; "nothing ventured, nothing gained") to regulate our personal and public relationships. We commonly call upon "national security" in times of international crisis. Policy is promulgated, criticized, and revised in the name of "social welfare," "justice," or the maximization of "utility."

---

[25] Ibid., p. 25.

[26] Cooper, tr., p. 12.

Importantly, what actors refer to as a correct or rational decision is located neither in the situation nor in the act itself; rather, it is discovered in the actor or actors resorting to the appropriate standard of judgment for that action. In cases of non-problematic choice, this usually means that those making the decision agree that the rule, principle, or standard is "appropriate" and that, in invoking it in this particular context, it justifies one manner of acting rather than another. Both determinations, the DDMP seminar is careful to note, are actor-defined judgments.

Actors' resource to rules, principles, or maxims may, nevertheless, prove in itself to be problematic in reaching a decision. Two sources of difficulty are outlined in the DDMP seminar:

> conflict regarding which of several apparently relevant, though inconsistent, rules or principles apply in the case at hand; and
>
> inability to operationalize an agreed-upon rule or principle in making a choice among particular acts.

"Justification" of belief or action assumes that actors have agreed both upon the appropriateness of a rule and on its validation of one of several ways of believing or acting in the particular situation. Such agreement seldom can be secured on *a priori* grounds. Who could help his young student choose?, asks Sartre.

> Christian doctrine? No. Christian doctrine says, "Be charitable, love your neighbor, take the more rugged path, etc., etc." But which is the more rugged path? Whom should he love as a brother? The fighting man or his mother? Which does the greater good, the vague act of fighting in a group, or the concrete one of helping a particular human being to go on living? Who can decide *a priori*? Nobody.[27]

Choice, students learn, is historically-bounded; that is, it is enacted in a particular situation in time. Because a choice must be appropriate to its "situation," agreement may be lacking either in what constitutes a correct rule of deciding or in its manner of application to the range of particular acts. A means for validating thought and action which removes choice from the realm of the problematic also removes choice from its historical setting. Again, the attention of the seminar is directed to those "reasons" which *situated* actors find acceptable in interpreting abstract values or rules in concrete choice.

Throughout, the DDMP seminar voices a concern for the *explanation* of significant human choices, i.e., for the justifications historical actors put forth or to which they assent in situations of problematic belief and action. Such an understanding of "explanation" differs from the study of choice behavior in psychology and some communication courses in important ways. It may be useful to explore this difference further.

Argument and Explanation

The DDMP seminar holds that human choice is intentional behavior and, therefore, distinguishes "reasons" given for choosing or deciding (x rather than y) from causal antecedents of x. This distinction is similar to that drawn by Oldenquist:

> When we say that Jones chose x for the sake of z, or in order to obtain z, we are not saying that some event preceded and caused x. What we are asserting is that Jones considered x to be more suitable than y for the

[27] Sartre, p. 25.

> attainment of *z*. It may be the case that some set of events precedes and causes action *x*, but that is not anything we assert when we give a reason for *x*.[28]

What the DDMP seminar assumes, therefore, is an alternative understanding or explanation of choice behavior to a covering-law (causal) model of behavior. At the immediate level of analysis, students are concerned with the reasons naive social actors find "acceptable" for believing, judging, or doing *x*. In the process, what is "explained" is not the *occurrence* of some belief or action, a matter of causality, but the grounds on which actors find such belief or action "acceptable," "rational," or "justified."

This mode of explanation closely resembles what Taylor has labelled "reason-giving" explanation to distinguish it from "scientific" (causal) explanation.[29] Monge offers this description:

> "Reason-giving explanations" account for why certain phenomena occur by showing why a person thought that a particular action or belief was right, correct, true, or a good thing to do. It often answers to the question of why a person felt that a particular action was a good thing to do rather than why the action did in fact occur. . . . Thus, reason-giving explanations allow us to *assess* a person's behavior in terms of the evaluative views he holds preceding his action . . . .[30]

The terms "reason," "reasonable," and "reason-giving behavior" incorporate the assumptions of actors' construction of alternate ways of believing and acting and, further, the view of persons as *agents* (sources) of their own acts.

At a second level, then, "reason-giving" serves as a methodology which students employ in observing/assessing the arguments advanced for and against important choices. Typically, students reach judgments about the wisdom, correctness, rationality, or appropriateness of some concrete decision, e.g., President Truman's July 24, 1945, order to General Spaatz to use an atomic bomb against the Japanese as soon after August 3rd as weather permitted. In supporting an evaluation of the wisdom, say, of this decision, students seek "reasons" which invoke the critical rules, principles, or criteria appropriate to the audience whose assent is sought. Such an audience may be simply the immediate assembly of students and professor or, more removed, an hypothesized audience of "scholars" or wider community of "all reasonable persons."[31]

Thus "argument," as a form of reason-giving behavior, is seen both as *a phenomenon which students may observe* and as *the mode of explanation* best suited to accomplishing this task.

Summary

A seminar in argumentation theory *qua* theory necessarily makes certain assumptions about its subject matter: What is the nature of the phenom-

---

[28] Andrew Oldenquist, "Choosing, Deciding, and Doing," in Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, v. 2 (New York: Macmillan and The Free Press [Reprinted], 1972), p. 99.

[29] Daniel M. Taylor, *Explanation and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

[30] Peter R. Monge, "Theory Construction in the Study of Communication: The Systems Paradigm," *Journal of Communication*, 23 (1973), 7–8.

[31] Cf. Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, tr. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), esp. pp. 31–35.

enon being studied? What is "explained" when one investigates this phenomenon? What mode of explanation is most suited to undertaking this task?

"Deliberation and the Decision-Making Process" takes as its central subject the study of arguments advanced for and against important public policy choices in late twentieth-century America. "Argument" is defined as *reason-giving behavior whose purpose is the "justification" of belief, judgment, or action.* The investigation of argumentative behavior draws its rationale from more fundamental concerns about the nature of *problematic* choice. In seeking to "explain" the decisions arrived at in controversial cases, students are concerned with describing the reasons advanced on a host of issues:

> judgments regarding the desired or preferred ends (consequences) of belief or action;
>
> judgments of the relative importance of values (especially in instances in which values clash in concrete choices);
>
> judgments about the probable occurrence of contingent events and the consequences of one's acts; and
>
> judgments regarding the rules, principles, or guides which actors invoke to "justify" one choice rather than another.

Judgments of this nature are "problematic" because they rest upon grounds or "reasons" which are *non-compelling*, i.e., they do not force one's conclusions.

In seeking a mode of explanation appropriate to their evaluation of the "reasonableness" of key decisions, and of the arguments on which such choices depend, students construct reasons themselves. Such reasons explain why a particular choice was reached by showing why a person thought it was "right, correct, true, or a good thing to do." The study of argument and argumentation thus is concerned not with the *causes* of personal or public decisions, but with the *viability* (justification) of such decisions.

EPP-91 (B/SU)